

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD**

TIMOTHY M. DOULETTE,
Appellant,

DOCKET NUMBER
NY-0752-17-0060-I-1

v.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE,
Agency.

DATE: June 5, 2023

THIS FINAL ORDER IS NONPRECEDENTIAL¹

Odarit V. Tirado, Carolina, Puerto Rico, for the appellant.

Anne M. Gallaudet, Esquire, and Leslie L. Rowe, Esquire, New York, New York, for the agency.

BEFORE

Cathy A. Harris, Vice Chairman
Raymond A. Limon, Member

FINAL ORDER

¶1 The appellant has filed a petition for review of the initial decision, which sustained his removal. On petition for review, the appellant argues that the administrative judge erred in merging the absence without leave (AWOL) and failure to follow leave policy charges, erred in making her credibility

¹ A nonprecedential order is one that the Board has determined does not add significantly to the body of MSPB case law. Parties may cite nonprecedential orders, but such orders have no precedential value; the Board and administrative judges are not required to follow or distinguish them in any future decisions. In contrast, a precedential decision issued as an Opinion and Order has been identified by the Board as significantly contributing to the Board's case law. See [5 C.F.R. § 1201.117\(c\)](#).

determinations, erred in finding that he received the order to return to work from administrative leave, and erred in finding that removal was a reasonable penalty for his lengthy period of AWOL. Generally, we grant petitions such as this one only in the following circumstances: the initial decision contains erroneous findings of material fact; the initial decision is based on an erroneous interpretation of statute or regulation or the erroneous application of the law to the facts of the case; the administrative judge's rulings during either the course of the appeal or the initial decision were not consistent with required procedures or involved an abuse of discretion, and the resulting error affected the outcome of the case; or new and material evidence or legal argument is available that, despite the petitioner's due diligence, was not available when the record closed. Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations, section 1201.115 ([5 C.F.R. § 1201.115](#)). After fully considering the filings in this appeal, we conclude that the petitioner has not established any basis under section 1201.115 for granting the petition for review. Therefore, we DENY the petition for review. Except as expressly MODIFIED to separately sustain the charges of AWOL and failure to follow leave policy, we AFFIRM the initial decision, which is now the Board's final decision.

¶2 AWOL and failure to follow leave procedures generally are separate charges with different elements of proof. *Valenzuela v. Department of the Army*, [107 M.S.P.R. 549](#), 553 n.* (2007). To prove an AWOL charge, the agency must show that the employee was absent and that his absence was not authorized or that his request for leave was properly denied. *Wesley v. U.S. Postal Service*, [94 M.S.P.R. 277](#), ¶ 14 (2003). To prove a failure to follow leave-requesting procedures, the agency must show that the employee failed to request leave for an absence and that he was clearly on notice of leave-requesting requirements and the likelihood of discipline for failure to comply. *Allen v. U.S. Postal Service*, [88 M.S.P.R. 491](#), ¶ 10 (2001).

¶3 Under some circumstances, the charges of failure to follow leave procedures and AWOL merge. The charges of failure to follow leave-requesting procedures and AWOL must be merged when they do not involve different misconduct or elements of proof; that is, when the charge of AWOL was based solely on the appellant's failure to follow leave-requesting procedures. *Westmoreland v. Department of Veterans Affairs*, [83 M.S.P.R. 625](#), ¶ 6 (1999), *aff'd*, 19 F. App'x 868 (Fed. Cir. 2001), *overruled on other grounds as recognized in Pickett v. Department of Agriculture*, [116 M.S.P.R. 439](#), ¶ 11 (2011). Here, the agency charged the appellant separately, and the AWOL charge is not based solely on the appellant's failure to follow leave procedures. Thus, under these circumstances, merger of the AWOL and failure to follow leave policy charges was not appropriate.

¶4 However, because the agency proved both charges, any error by the administrative judge in merging these charges provides no basis to reverse the initial decision. *Panter v. Department of the Air Force*, [22 M.S.P.R. 281](#), 282 (1984) (holding that an adjudicatory error that is not prejudicial to a party's substantive rights provides no basis for reversal of an initial decision). The agency established that the appellant was absent from his workplace for 45 work days from January 23, 2016, through March 25, 2016, and that his absence was not authorized. Additionally, the agency proved that the appellant failed to call the agency's leave-requesting system or inform his supervisors he would be absent as specified under the charge of failure to follow leave policy. *See Allen*, [88 M.S.P.R. 491](#), ¶ 10; Initial Appeal File (IAF), Tab 1 at 17. The appellant has provided no basis for disturbing the administrative judge's well-reasoned finding that, as a supervisor who was trained in time-and-attendance procedures, he was aware of the process he had to follow to obtain approved leave. IAF, Tab 32, Initial Decision at 14. Accordingly, we find that the agency proved both its charges of AWOL and failure to follow leave policy.

NOTICE OF APPEAL RIGHTS²

The initial decision, as supplemented by this Final Order, constitutes the Board's final decision in this matter. [5 C.F.R. § 1201.113](#). You may obtain review of this final decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703\(a\)\(1\)](#). By statute, the nature of your claims determines the time limit for seeking such review and the appropriate forum with which to file. [5 U.S.C. § 7703\(b\)](#). Although we offer the following summary of available appeal rights, the Merit Systems Protection Board does not provide legal advice on which option is most appropriate for your situation and the rights described below do not represent a statement of how courts will rule regarding which cases fall within their jurisdiction. If you wish to seek review of this final decision, you should immediately review the law applicable to your claims and carefully follow all filing time limits and requirements. Failure to file within the applicable time limit may result in the dismissal of your case by your chosen forum.

Please read carefully each of the three main possible choices of review below to decide which one applies to your particular case. If you have questions about whether a particular forum is the appropriate one to review your case, you should contact that forum for more information.

(1) Judicial review in general. As a general rule, an appellant seeking judicial review of a final Board order must file a petition for review with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, which must be received by the court within **60 calendar days** of the date of issuance of this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703\(b\)\(1\)\(A\)](#).

² Since the issuance of the initial decision in this matter, the Board may have updated the notice of review rights included in final decisions. As indicated in the notice, the Board cannot advise which option is most appropriate in any matter.

If you submit a petition for review to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, you must submit your petition to the court at the following address:

U.S. Court of Appeals
for the Federal Circuit
717 Madison Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20439

Additional information about the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit is available at the court's website, www.cafc.uscourts.gov. Of particular relevance is the court's "Guide for Pro Se Petitioners and Appellants," which is contained within the court's Rules of Practice, and Forms 5, 6, 10, and 11.

If you are interested in securing pro bono representation for an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, you may visit our website at <http://www.mspb.gov/probono> for information regarding pro bono representation for Merit Systems Protection Board appellants before the Federal Circuit. The Board neither endorses the services provided by any attorney nor warrants that any attorney will accept representation in a given case.

(2) Judicial or EEOC review of cases involving a claim of discrimination. This option applies to you only if you have claimed that you were affected by an action that is appealable to the Board and that such action was based, in whole or in part, on unlawful discrimination. If so, you may obtain judicial review of this decision—including a disposition of your discrimination claims—by filing a civil action with an appropriate U.S. district court (*not* the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit), within **30 calendar days** after you receive this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703\(b\)\(2\)](#); *see Perry v. Merit Systems Protection Board*, [582 U.S. 420](#) (2017). If you have a representative in this case, and your representative receives this decision before you do, then you must file with the district court no later than **30 calendar days** after your representative receives this decision. If the action involves a claim of discrimination based on

race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or a disabling condition, you may be entitled to representation by a court-appointed lawyer and to waiver of any requirement of prepayment of fees, costs, or other security. See [42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5\(f\)](#) and [29 U.S.C. § 794a](#).

Contact information for U.S. district courts can be found at their respective websites, which can be accessed through the link below:

http://www.uscourts.gov/Court_Locator/CourtWebsites.aspx.

Alternatively, you may request review by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of your discrimination claims only, excluding all other issues. [5 U.S.C. § 7702\(b\)\(1\)](#). You must file any such request with the EEOC's Office of Federal Operations within **30 calendar days after you receive** this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7702\(b\)\(1\)](#). If you have a representative in this case, and your representative receives this decision before you do, then you must file with the EEOC no later than **30 calendar days after your representative receives** this decision.

If you submit a request for review to the EEOC by regular U.S. mail, the address of the EEOC is:

Office of Federal Operations
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
P.O. Box 77960
Washington, D.C. 20013

If you submit a request for review to the EEOC via commercial delivery or by a method requiring a signature, it must be addressed to:

Office of Federal Operations
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
131 M Street, N.E.
Suite 5SW12G
Washington, D.C. 20507

(3) Judicial review pursuant to the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012. This option applies to you only if you have raised claims of reprisal for whistleblowing disclosures under [5 U.S.C. § 2302\(b\)\(8\)](#) or

other protected activities listed in [5 U.S.C. § 2302\(b\)\(9\)\(A\)\(i\), \(B\), \(C\), or \(D\)](#). If so, and your judicial petition for review “raises no challenge to the Board’s disposition of allegations of a prohibited personnel practice described in section 2302(b) other than practices described in section 2302(b)(8), or 2302(b)(9)(A)(i), (B), (C), or (D),” then you may file a petition for judicial review either with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit or any court of appeals of competent jurisdiction.³ The court of appeals must receive your petition for review within **60 days** of the date of issuance of this decision. [5 U.S.C. § 7703\(b\)\(1\)\(B\)](#).

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Washington, D.C. 20439

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³ The original statutory provision that provided for judicial review of certain whistleblower claims by any court of appeals of competent jurisdiction expired on December 27, 2017. The All Circuit Review Act, signed into law by the President on July 7, 2018, permanently allows appellants to file petitions for judicial review of MSPB decisions in certain whistleblower reprisal cases with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit or any other circuit court of appeals of competent jurisdiction. The All Circuit Review Act is retroactive to November 26, 2017. Pub. L. No. 115-195, 132 Stat. 1510.

Board neither endorses the services provided by any attorney nor warrants that any attorney will accept representation in a given case.

Contact information for the courts of appeals can be found at their respective websites, which can be accessed through the link below:

http://www.uscourts.gov/Court_Locator/CourtWebsites.aspx.

FOR THE BOARD:

/s/ for

Jennifer Everling
Acting Clerk of the Board

Washington, D.C.